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Ideas and Practices of the Kyoto School of Japanese Geopolitics

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Introduction

During the time of the Asia-Pacific War, the Kyoto school of geopolitics was well-known for its advocacy of a specifically “Japanese,” that is to say indigenous, brand of geopolitics. All members of the school had a more or less close relationship with the Department of Geography at Kyoto Imperial University during the 1930s and 40s. The school’s head, Professor Komaki Saneshige (1898-1990, see Figure 1), as well as his followers, used the term *Nihon chiseigaku* (Japanese geopolitics) to describe their geopolitics (Komaki 1940, 1942a, b).

Almost all previous studies of the Kyoto school have concentrated on its chauvinistic and unscientific nature and its justification of Japanese imperialistic policy (Takeuchi 1980, 1994, 2000, 2001). However, it is certain that their geopolitical arguments had a strong influence on academic circles and the press at that time (Murakami 1999a: 50; Yamaguchi 1943: 237). Therefore we need to discuss the following questions: (1) How was it possible to establish the Kyoto school of geopolitics? (2) How were their geopolitical arguments able to win the support of contemporary people? (3) What role did the school play in carrying out total war? In other words, the first weak point of previous studies of this school is that they have not examined the social impact of practical aspects of the school, that is to say, its propaganda activities in domestic as well as foreign spheres, and its participation in the strategy considerations of the Imperial Japanese Army.¹ Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the characteristics of the ideas and practices of the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics, paying attention to the social impact of the school’s practical activities.

A close look at previous studies reveals that basic facts about the Kyoto school of geopolitics were not interpreted correctly because of insufficient analysis of the primary sources (Fukushima 1997; Takeuchi 1980, 1994, 2000, 2001). Before my investigation (Shibata 2007), the connection of the school with wartime military authorities had remained unsupported by historical documentation. This is the

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second weak point of previous studies. Therefore, by using a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, such as (1) a staff officer's diary— the diary of Colonel Takashima Tatsuhiko (1897-1978) who worked in the *Sanbō-honbu* (the General Staff Office) (Takashima 1938-1941); (2) contemporary documents, reports written by some members of the school (Muroga *et al.* 2001); (3) a bibliography that Komaki himself wrote (Shibata 2005, see Figure 2); (4) the memoirs written by some members of the school after the end of war (Asai Tatsurō 1997; Asai Tokuichi 1978; Bekki 1970; Komaki 1980; Mano 1981; Murakami 1999a), and (5) interviews with some of the school's members (Asai 1999; Murakami 1999b; Yonekura 1999), I will be able to shed new light on various aspects of the Kyoto school of geopolitics during those days.

The organization of this paper is as follows: to begin with, I will demonstrate the connection of the Kyoto school of geopolitics to the military authorities. Next, I will examine the ideological composition of the school. After that, I would like to examine their propaganda activities in the domestic as well as foreign spheres, that is to say, the practical activities of the school's social engagement. In addition, I will mention the circumstances of the Kyoto school after the end of war. Finally, I will make some concluding remarks about the characteristics of the ideas and practices of the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics.

The connection of the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics with the military authorities

The Department of Geography at Kyoto Imperial University was established in 1907 and was characterized by an emphasis on historical geography. Komaki Saneshige received his doctorate in 1937 from Kyoto Imperial University on the basis of a thesis on prehistoric geography,² and in March 1938 became professor and the third head of the department (Shibata 2006: 3-4). However, Komaki had actually been in a position of leadership since 1936 when the second department head Ishibashi Gorō (1877-1946) retired. As soon as Komaki finished writing his doctoral dissertation at the end of 1936, he and his followers began to carry out research on geopolitics (Komaki 1980; Shibata 2007: 3). They had a great antipathy toward Western imperialism, especially that of the British Empire. Moreover immigration issues— restrictions on immigration from Japan to the USA— were closely related to racial discrimination and were of great concern to them (Komaki 1940). In addition, it should be noted that almost all of them had read *Politische Geographie* by Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), regarded as a classic of geopolitics, in the mid-1930s (Murakami 1999a: 50). Consequently, we can date the beginning of the Kyoto school of geopolitics to before the outbreak of the 2nd Sino-Japanese War in July 1937.

In November 1938 the Kyoto school was asked to conduct research on geopolitics by Colonel Takashima Tatsuhiko who worked in the General Staff Office

(Takashima 1938-1941). Responding to this request, Komaki and his followers began to emphasize the necessity of creating a new “Japanese geopolitics” as a “new geography” (Komaki 1938), and held a research meeting with Takashima and some other military staff in that same month (Takashima 1938-1941). This group was one of the affiliated groups for research on *sōryokusen* (total war) that had been organized by Takashima in the same year, and was called the *Sōgō Chiri Kenkyūkai* (General Geographical Study Group) (Muroga *et al.* 2001: 75; Takashima 1938-1941). In this paper, however, I would like to refer to it as the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics. Takashima regarded the school as a geographical section to help in carrying out total war, especially *shisōsen* (ideological warfare) (Mano 1981: 73-74; Takashima 1938-1941). The Kyoto school obtained financial support from the business community in the Kansai area (Mano 1981: 73). They rented a house near Kyoto Imperial University, collected pertinent materials, and held weekly (or biweekly) meetings there (see Figure 3) (Murakami 1999a: 51-53, 1999b: 58-63; Takashima 1938-1941; Yonekura 1999: 16-17).

Moreover, the Kyoto school also had a connection with the *Jōhō-bu* (the Military Intelligence Division) that controlled the media during the Asia-Pacific War. This connection was made by Takashima who worked at the Military Intelligence Division before being transferred to the General Staff Office (Satō 1995; Takashima 1938a). The Kyoto school was linked with the department of the press (the Second Section) and propaganda for domestic and foreign spheres (the Third and Fifth Sections) in particular. They published a series of geopolitical area studies in a magazine that was initiated by the officer Suzuki Kurazō (1894-1964) of the Second Section (Komaki *et al.* 1942; Satō 2004: 268-275). Komaki was able to speak over the radio about his geopolitics and became a member of the board of directors of *Dai Nihon Genron Hōkokukai* (Japan Speech Patriotism Society) that had a strong influence on regulation of the press in the domestic sphere because he had the connection with the Third and Fifth Sections (Akazawa 1993; Komaki 1942c, d; Shibata 2005: 45).

Therefore, it is important to recognize that the ideas and practices of the Kyoto school were strongly influenced by the Imperial Japanese Army. On this point, the school differed from another famous geopolitician, Ezawa Jōji (1907-1975), who was a member of the brain trust of the *Chōsa-ka* (the Research Division) of the Imperial Japanese Navy (Takagi 1967: 196-198). This brain trust was founded by Colonel Takagi Sōkichi (1893-1979) in November 1940, and members of the “Kyoto school of philosophy” such as Kōyama Iwao (1905-1993) and Kōsaka Masaaki (1900-1969) also participated in it (Ōhashi 2001; Takagi 1967: 187-207). Moreover, it is also important to keep in mind that the Army and the Navy stood in opposition to each other (Ōhashi 2001).

The ideological composition of the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics

The Kyoto school criticized Western exploration, conventional geography, and German *Geopolitik* for the following reasons: According to their opinion, Western exploration served as a tool for Western colonization (Komaki 1942a: 118-120). They held the view that conventional geography— including *keikan chirigaku* (landscape geography or *Landschaftsgeographie*) that was the contemporary mainstream human geography and advocated by Tsujimura Tarō (1890-1983), professor of geography at Tokyo Imperial University (Tsujimura 1937)— had been perverted by a Eurocentric and, in general, Western point of view, and had lost its social relevance because it disregarded human decision-making and the importance of history (Komaki 1940: 56-60, 66-67). Komaki wrote that “Conventional geography was a discipline meant to maintain the status quo ruled by the Western world view” (Komaki 1942a: 32). Members of the Kyoto school valued the practical aspects of *Geopolitik*, but on the other hand criticized it for being based on racism and environmental determinism, and for consequently playing the role of the guardian of Western imperialism (Komaki 1940: 67-69).

Based on these critiques, then, the Kyoto school advocated “Japanese geopolitics” as a “new geography.” According to their thinking, it was indigenous and attached importance to the autonomy of Japan (Komaki 1940: 75-80). Komaki wrote, “Scientific studies were neither objective nor neutral, but strongly dyed by the consideration of subjects from Western countries” (Komaki 1942b: 155). They considered that the most important thing was that their geopolitics had to develop on the basis of the identity of Japan or from the viewpoint of Japan (Komaki 1940: 75-80). From this perspective, they criticized the “simple imitation of German *Geopolitik*” advocated by some geopoliticians like Iimoto Nobuyuki (1895-1989), the general-secretary of the *Nihon Chiseigaku Kyōkai* (the Japan Association of Geopolitics) which was founded in November 1941 (Komaki 1944a: 49-53).

The Kyoto school emphasized that Japanese geopolitics should constitute a foundation for national policy as well as the Japanese spiritual tradition and consequently had a practical nature to it (Komaki 1940: 174-179). Komaki wrote, “We need to establish the new geography which aims to rebuild the world and make it as it originally should be... This new geography is not the science of *sein* (what is) but one of *sollen* (what should be)... We can realize the “ideal” world not through Western-style geography based on individualism but through this new geography based on *Tennō*-ism” (Komaki 1942a: 34-35). *Tennō*-ism meant the belief connected with Shintoism which was based on the so-called *Kōdō* (Imperial Way) ideology. *Kōdō* means the way of reigning by the *Tennō* (Japanese emperor). In other words, they tried to contribute to the creation of an “ideal” world centred on the Japanese emperor.

Therefore, using their knowledge of historical and geographical scholarship, the Kyoto school tried to clarify what had been destroyed or altered by Western coloni-

zation in Asian countries (see Figure 4) (Komaki 1940: 81-99). This was related to their view derived from their folklore scholarship that the nature and culture of each land should be maintained under an indigenous order (Komaki 1940: 73-74, 1942d: 108). They remarked on the economic problems of Asian countries caused by the dominance of the Western powers in Asia and on the racial discrimination against Asian people (Komaki 1942d). In short, they intended to criticize Western imperialism. However, at the same time, they sensed that the mere exposure and condemnation of Western imperialism was not enough to legitimize the similar imperialistic policies implemented in Asian countries by Japan. As an alternative ideology, they posited “Pan-Asianism,” the idea of communalistic unity binding Asian people together (Komaki 1942d). They considered that the Asian economy should be reorganized on the basis of Asian agriculture (Komaki 1940, 1942d).

The Kyoto school also regarded the synthetic study of history and geography as a “new historical geography” (Muroga 1942a: 78). According to their ideas, this synthetic study was able to understand an area dynamically and formatively within modern world history that encompassed global relationships (Komaki 1942e: 4-6). In other words, they tried to construct a “new geography” that integrated history with geography.

The social impact of the practical aspects of the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics: their propaganda activities

In this chapter, I would like to examine the propaganda activities of the Kyoto school in collaboration with the military authorities, using various media such as books, magazines, radio, and lectures. Even though their activities began in November 1938 when Komaki first emphasized the necessity of “Japanese geopolitics” (Komaki 1938), the following three turning points are very important for understanding their activities:

The first turning point was October 1940 when Komaki published *Nihon chiseigaku sengen* (Manifesto of Japanese geopolitics) (see Figure 5) (Komaki 1940). His book got a boost from many people, especially in journalism, and the number of the school’s publications increased remarkably (Komaki 1980; Murakami 1999a: 50; Yamaguchi 1943: 237). The second turning point was the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War in December 1941. After that, members of the school were asked to contribute geopolitical studies of the areas under Japanese influence or outright occupation, or prospective areas that Japan might invade (Komaki 1942b; Komaki *et al.* 1942; Shibata 2005: 47-56). The third turning point was January 1943 when Komaki became a member of the board of directors of *Dai Nihon Genron Hōkokukai* (Akazawa 1993). After that, especially after mid 1943, the contents of his propaganda became non-geopolitical and fanatical because he was influenced by members of the society, and the media’s requests to write on geopolitical area studies decreased along with the deterioration of the war situation (Komaki 1944a;

Shibata 2005: 47-56).

After recognizing these turning points, I examined the geopolitical area studies of the Kyoto school that were regarded as the main result of their propaganda activities. The reason why the Kyoto school began to study geopolitical area studies was related to the thinking of Colonel Takashima. He intended to reinforce ideological warfare by clarifying the history and strategy of the Western imperialist invasion of Asian countries and emphasizing the holy nature of Japanese warfare to liberate Asia from the Western powers (Takashima 1938b).

Consequently Komaki assigned to his followers the areas in which they were to specialize (Murakami 1999a: 51-52; Yonekura 1999: 17), and the Kyoto school began in 1940 to clarify the geopolitical importance of each area of the world from the viewpoint of Japan, as a geographical section to aid in carrying out total war, especially ideological warfare (Komaki 1942a, b; Muroga *et al.* 2001). In addition, after 1940 Komaki forced his students to deal with the geopolitical issues of foreign countries in their graduation theses, in order to use their work as basic works for geopolitical area studies (Kōno 1990: 5). The Kyoto school wrote geopolitical area studies based on the huge accumulation of studies compiled by Western researchers, because during wartime they could not conduct field surveys of the areas in which they specialized (Asai Tatsurō 1997: 553; Asai Tokuichi 1978: 3; Bekki 1970: 347).

They collaborated on publication projects to spread their geopolitical world views, for example, (1) the series “*Sekai chiri seiji taikei* (Compendium of world geography and politics)” (see Table 1), and (2) “*Shin sekai chishi* (New world regional geography)” that were published serially in the ultra-nationalistic magazine *Shin Wakōdo* (New Young Person) that was initiated by military officer Suzuki in order to spread nationalist ideology to younger generations (see Table 2) (Komaki *et al.* 1942; Satō 2004: 268-275). Furthermore, Komaki gave speeches over the radio beamed into domestic and foreign areas, for example, the USA and China (Komaki 1942c, d), and he gave a lot of lectures in both Japan and in Manchukuo (Shibata 2005: 45). The geopolitical area studies of the Kyoto school were intensively published in 1942, because the media’s requests increased along with initial victories in the war (Komaki 1942a, b; Shibata 2005: 47-56). Although they studied each area of the world, their published works’ focus was clustered in countries of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Very few of their studies of America and Europe were published (Komaki 1942a, b; Shibata 2005: 47-56).

In these numerous publications, the Kyoto school emphasized the unity of the Asia-Pacific area and Australia and/or India, and insisted on their geopolitical world view that was unified by a concept of a unified Asia (see Figure 6) (Komaki 1942a, b, d, 1944a), that was different from that of the West based on duality (Agnew 1998). In this sense, they opposed regarding the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as a bloc or *Grossraum* (Komaki 1942f: 61, 1944a: 158-164). They called the Australian continent the “South Asian continent,” and the North American

continent the “Northeast Asian continent” (Komaki 1942b: 142-157). In this way, they tried to influence the public through their advocacy of such counter-logic to western colonialism.

Their geopolitical area studies attracted considerable attention among academic circles and the press and their books were widely read (Tanaka 1999: 260-261; Yamaguchi 1943: 237). The remarks by the Kyoto school on the economic problems of Japan caused by the dominance of the Western powers in East Asia and on the racial discrimination against the Japanese (Komaki 1942d), had a considerable effect on the Japanese public. In 1942, some members of the Kyoto school—Asai Tokuichi (1913-2003), Bekki Atsuhiko (1908-1997), Yonekura Jirō (1909-2002)—were dispatched as military administrators to Indonesia and Burma, then under Japanese occupation, because their geopolitical area studies were highly regarded by the military authorities (Asai 1980: 5; Bekki 1970: 347; Okada 2000: 220).

The Kyoto school influenced geographical education in those days (Komaki 1942f: 56; Muroga 1942b: 83-85). For example, they published many articles in major education circle magazines—*Nihon Kyōiku* (Japanese Education) and *Kōa Kyōiku* (Education of Rising Nations in Asia), etc. — and participated in the committee that prepared geographical textbooks (Ozaki 1979: 3-7).

In addition, their geopolitical world view carried by Radio Tokyo (the overseas broadcast by NHK) created a sensation in the USA (Komaki 1942d). Selden C. Menefee, a specialist in the field of radio propaganda, wrote, “Future historians may well rate the ‘Komaki Memorial’ as the most significant document to come out of Japan during this war” (Menefee 1943: 332). It is significant that Komaki was a well-known Japanese geographer in the USA at the time (Fifield and Percy 1944: 20; Menefee 1942).

As a result, the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics made a contribution to the improvement of the status of geography as a discipline. For example, the *Chirigaku Bukai* (the committee on geography) was newly organized in the *Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai* (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science) that had a strong influence on academic circles (Monbu-shō Kyōgaku-kyoku 1942; Nihon Chiri Gakkai 1975: 33-34), and the Kyoto school succeeded in participating in various social activities.

The Kyoto school after the war

Soon after the defeat of Japan in the Asia-Pacific War, several officers from the Allied General Headquarters visited the Department of Geography at Kyoto Imperial University in order to command Komaki to reproduce reports on the Asia-Pacific region that were written during wartime (Komaki 1980; Murakami 1999a: 53). However, Komaki declined this command, because he had already broken up the *Sōgō Chiri Kenkyūkai* (Murakami 1999a: 53). This fact is not irrelevant to Komaki’s reputation in the USA which was previously mentioned.

Almost all members of the Kyoto school resigned from their posts in 1945 or 1946

(Murakami 1999b: 63-66). Furthermore, Komaki was purged from public posts on the orders of the Allied Forces in 1947 for having served as director of the *Dai Nihon Genron Hōkokukai* (Shibata 2005, 2007: 15-16). Some other members of the school were purged from public posts because they had published geopolitical books (Asai 1980: 6; Murakami 1999b: 63-66; Yonekura 1999: 21). Most of the books published by the Kyoto school during wartime were collected and disposed of by General Headquarters. The reason for this is that these books were regarded as objects of confiscation (Senryōshi Kenkyūkai 2005).

With the end of the Allied occupation in 1952, most members of the Kyoto school of geopolitics found posts in newly-created universities and other institutions. For example, Komaki obtained a professorship and then became president of the national university in Shiga (Shibata 2005, 2007: 15-16). Although he did not publish geopolitical works, he continued to have faith in “Japanese geopolitics” even after the Asia-Pacific War, partly because he knew of the fact that a doctoral dissertation which made an affirmative evaluation of his geopolitics was published in the USA (Horiuchi 1975; Komaki 1980). Many of his former students who had been allotted specific area studies renewed their geographical work in foreign countries and became authorities in their respective areas of study, but without the former geopolitical overtones (Bekki 1960; Yonekura 1960). However, some of them also, like Komaki, had a lot of confidence in their geopolitics (Okada 2000: 250-252; Shibata 2007: 15-16).

Concluding Remarks

Up till now, I have examined both ideological and practical aspects of the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics. In this final chapter I will make some concluding remarks about the characteristics of the ideas and practices of the school. Also, I would like to make some suggestions derived from the ideas and practices of the school.

First, the reason why the Kyoto school succeeded in participating in various social activities was that they had a strong connection with the military authorities. They were also able to start research on geopolitics and publish many books and articles owing to this connection. Therefore I would like to emphasize that this connection is very important in understanding the ideas and practices of the Kyoto school.

Second, it is clear that the practical activities of the Kyoto school had a social impact. Their geopolitical arguments made from the viewpoint of Japan had a strong influence on academic circles and the press in both the domestic as well as foreign spheres during the Asia-Pacific War. For example, their geopolitical world views had an effect on the geographical understanding of the world and on geographical education at that time. However, it was also true that their geopolitical area studies were in this sense paradoxical, since they were based on Westerners’ contributions. The Kyoto school suggested important problems

concerning ‘the concept of value’ (Fukushima 1997: 419) and positionality in geographical research, especially in non-Western countries, and the politics of the nature of geographical knowledge and the status of geography as a discipline.

Third, the Kyoto school also suggested important problems concerning the difficulty of Pan-Asianism. That is to say, it was certain that the Pan-Asianism that they advocated had significance as an alternative ideology to Western imperialism. However, it did not function at all as a logic of unity for Asian people. For example, Komaki’s lecture conducted in Manchukuo was rejected by Chinese people (Liu 1993). The reason for this is that the Kyoto school’s Pan-Asianism was an extension of the idea of a communal state centred on the *Tenno* family applied to the “Asian community” as a whole. In addition, the Kyoto school could not completely relativize not only Western knowledge but also Japan itself, and served to justify the aggressive war of the Japanese Empire. So we have to sufficiently recognize the ambivalent and debatable nature of Pan-Asianism and continue to question the concepts of “Asia” and “the West.”

Last, I should emphasize that these problems suggested by the Kyoto school of Japanese geopolitics are not merely problems of the past. Therefore, we must recognize and discuss these problems again and again with people from many disciplines and nationalities.

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Notes

- 1) I am not concerned in this paper with the Kyoto school’s participation in strategy deliberations of the Imperial Japanese Army. Please refer to Kobayashi and Narumi (2008) and Kobayashi *et al.* (2010) for further detail.
- 2) Komaki was a specialist in historical and prehistoric geography, especially with regard to the reconstruction of historical landscapes and interpretation of past landscapes (Komaki 1937).

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(J) written in Japanese

(JE) written in Japanese with English abstract

(C) written in Chinese

Figure



Figure 1. Portrait of Komaki Saneshige (1938)

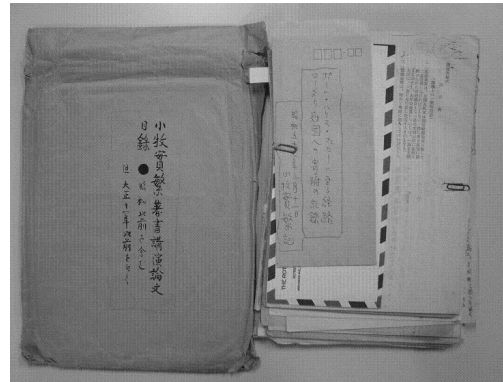
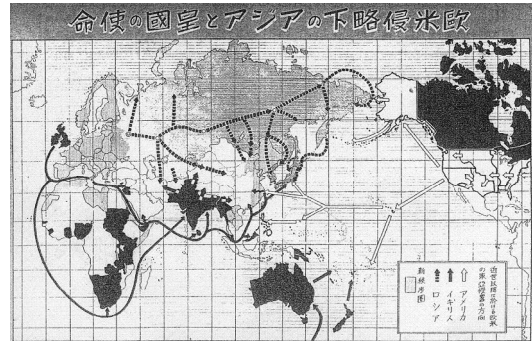
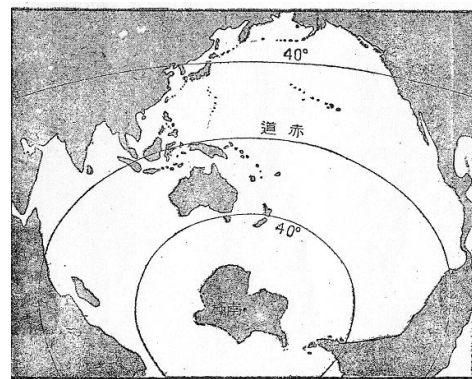


Figure 2. Bibliography of Komaki written by himself



Figure 3. Research meeting at a rented house near Kyoto Imperial University (November 1939)

Figure 4. Routes of Invasion of Asia by Western powers
Source: *Nihon Kyōiku*, January 1942.Figure 5. Front cover of *Nihon Chiseigaku Sengen* by Komaki (1940)

圖洋慶印・洋平太 圖七第

Figure 6. Geopolitical world view of the Kyoto school
Source: Komaki 1944b: 143.

Table

Table 1. Composition of “*Sekai chiri seiji taiker*”

Contents	Author	Published Year
Japan	Komaki Saneshige	Unpublished
Manchuria and China	Yonekura Jirō	1944.6
Indochina	Muroga Nobuo	1941.11
Dutch East Indies	Bekki Atsuhiko	1941.9
Pacific Ocean	Bekki Atsuhiko	Unpublished
Australia	Wada Shunji	Unpublished
Siberia, Mongolia and Tibet	Mikami Masatoshi	Unpublished
India	Asai Tokuichi	1942.7
Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Arabia	Matsui Taketoshi	Unpublished
Turkey, Syria and Palestine	Noma Saburō	1942.11
Europe	Noma Saburō	Unpublished
Africa	Tomonaga Yōjirō	Unpublished
North America	Kawakami Kiyoshi	Unpublished
Central and South America	Shibata Takao	Unpublished
The North and South Pole	Komaki Saneshige and Kawakami Kiyoshi	1942.3

Table 2. Contents of “*Shin sekai chishi*” (1942)

Subject Area of Article	Author	Month Published
(Idea of their “new geography”)	Komaki Saneshige	January
South Asia	Matsui Taketoshi	February
Latin America	Bekki Atsuhiko	March
Australia and New Zealand	Wada Shunji	April
North America	Kobata Akira	May
India	Asai Tokuichi	June
Manchuria and China	Yonekura Jirō	July
Africa	Tomonaga Yōjirō	August
Siberia and Alaska	Mikami Masatoshi	September
Europe	Noma Saburō	October
Southwest Asia	Matsui Taketoshi	November
The North and South Pole	Kawakami Kiyoshi	December